

Initial Questions and Answers Regarding Proposal to Close River Terrace Elementary School

Q: Why is this proposal being considered?

A: River Terrace has a very low enrollment relative to all other PS-5 schools in DCPS, and its enrollment has declined significantly over time. This makes River Terrace unable to sustain a robust PS-5 school program with comprehensive academic and extracurricular opportunities. Thomas Elementary has had recent improvements in its building and with additional students will be able to offer an even broader academic and extracurricular program. By transitioning River Terrace students to Thomas, we are confident we can enhance the academic, enrichment, and support services offered to all students. By closing severely under-enrolled schools, DCPS can reallocate resources currently spent on maintaining half-empty buildings towards programs that directly impact students.

Q: What are the benefits of attending a school with a larger enrollment?

A: Schools with a larger enrollment are able to offer more academic classes, extracurricular activities, partnerships, and support services to students at the school. With a larger staff, there are more opportunities for teachers to collaborate and work in grade-level teams to improve the instruction offered to all students.

Q: When would this closure occur? What changes would take place this year?

A: If this proposal is approved, River Terrace would close at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, stakeholders from both school communities, with support from the central office, would work together over the course of the winter and spring to ensure a smooth transition for staff, students, families, and community. Students would transition to Thomas Elementary at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year.

Q: How would students from River Terrace get to Thomas safely?

A: Student safety is the highest priority, and we recognize the challenge posed by the need for many students to cross Benning Road to get to Thomas Elementary. As a result, DCPS would provide daily bus service in the morning and afternoon between River Terrace and Thomas. This would include a bus immediately after school as well as at the conclusion of afterschool activities. Any student wishing to take advantage of this would have free daily transportation to and from the receiving school. Additionally, we would work closely with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to identify safe walking routes and determine if additional crossing guards are needed or should be deployed in different locations.

Q: What does the Thomas facility offer?

Thomas Elementary School received a Phase 1 modernization during the summer of 2010. As a result, Thomas now has modernized academic spaces complete with new furnishings and equipment, and enhancements to modernize the acoustic, lighting, ergonomics, technology, climate and comfort of the classrooms to support 21st century learning needs. In the near future, modernization of the school's common area, fields and building systems will continue.

Q: Would students be able to continue to participate in existing afterschool programs and partnerships?

A: We are committed to ensuring that we retain as much stability as possible for students. Programs currently at River Terrace would continue to operate as they do this year. We will work with afterschool programs and partners to determine if they are open to continuing their programs at Thomas for the next school year. We would also solicit feedback from River Terrace families on existing programs that are highly valued and would prioritize relocating these programs to the new site.

Q: What are the program offerings at Thomas?

A: Thomas Elementary implements the Schoolwide Application Model (SAM), which is a general education support approach that focuses on fully integrating and coordinating resources to improve academic and social outcomes for all students. Additionally, like River Terrace, Thomas has a strong focus on health and fitness and participates in the Fun Fly Fit Fitness and Wellness Program and is a member of the Alliance for Healthy Schools. They also participate in a food pilot program receiving food made from scratch from DC Central Kitchen. Students also stay physically fit by participating on the school's step team. Thomas has numerous community partners including DC Reads, Everybody Wins, and the Embassy Adoption Program. We would also look at the partnerships and programming at River Terrace and work to transfer successful programs and partnerships to the new school.

Q: How would you address potential conflicts between groups of students from the two schools?

A: Based on the experience of recent school consolidations, we are confident that with appropriate adult support, our students would be able to form positive relationships across students groups as they get to know each other. Proposing this closure in the fall allows school leadership ample time to work with staff, students, and families to ensure a smooth transition. If the proposal is implemented, there will be opportunities for students and families to meet prior to the consolidation to help facilitate a positive school culture.

Q: How would staff at River Terrace be affected?

A: River Terrace staff would be excessed and subject to the provisions of the relevant collective bargaining agreements. We anticipate that as a result of the closure there would be additional positions available at Thomas and that some River Terrace staff members would be able to move to the new site if they choose. Staffing decisions for open positions at Thomas would be made by Thomas Principal Ruth Barnes once school budgets become available in the early spring. Any River Terrace staff member who requests an interview at Thomas will be granted one and considered for any available positions in their area. River Terrace staff interested in working at Thomas will also have opportunities to learn about the school and will be able to work with their human resources staffing specialists to consider this and other options. Additionally, DCPS will hold several job fairs where employees can learn about and apply for available positions at other DCPS schools during the spring.

Q: What would happen to the River Terrace building?

A: Should this proposal be approved, DCPS would turn control of the building back to the city. The building would continue to have city maintenance and upkeep and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education would lead a community process around potential options for reuse.

Q: How would the central office support River Terrace during this process?

A: If the proposal is approved, interested parents, teachers, staff, and community members from both schools would come together to develop a transition plan with central office support. This plan would include opportunities for groups of students, parents, staff, and community to meet and get to know each other, and for school staff to work together professionally to develop a shared vision for success. Depending on identified needs, other DCPS staff and representatives of city agencies such as MPD and DDOT would also provide support.

Q: If the proposal is approved, would River Terrace parents receive a preference in the out-of-boundary lottery?

A: Yes, if you would like your child to apply to attend a school other than Thomas, current River Terrace students would receive a preference in the out-of-boundary lottery. The out-of boundary application period is open from January 28, 2011 to February 28, 2011 and offers an opportunity for parents to apply for enrollment at a school outside their neighborhood school. River Terrace students would have the second preference in the out-of-boundary lottery, after siblings, due to their status as students at a closing school. Applications are submitted online through the DCPS website, and staff from the school or from the DCPS central office will be happy to help families with the process.